Written by Administrator
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One of the most difficult challenges directors face when working with a classic – particularly one such as *The Wizard of Oz* – is maintaining their vision while honoring the cherished memories every audience member holds. Georgia Jecklin, the director of Countryside Community Theatre's production of *The Wizard of Oz*, accomplished this difficult challenge in a delightfully creative way.

Though the show runs just shy of three hours, the audience's attention never wavered at the July 21 performance. That is an astounding feat when you consider that a good third of the audience was small children. Much of the credit goes to a very fine and very large cast – 77 in all … and Toto, too. Congratulations again to Jecklin for blending this large group into a cohesive unit.

Whitney Basher as Dorothy is a lovely actress with a voice to match. Her rendition of "Over the Rainbow" was beautifully sung. Daniel Kelchen, as the Scarecrow, is lively and loose as he trips and flails his way down the Yellow Brick Road, while Tin Man Scott Rasso wears his heart on his sleeve during a fine performance. And Jeff Behan, as the Cowardly Lion, is marvelous and nearly stops the show with "King of the Forest." Susan McPeters is a wonderful Wicked Witch of the West, giving her character just the right amount of witchy-ness without going over the top.

Rounding out the fine cast of principal actors are Susan McDonald as Auntie Em, Connie Green as Glinda, Dennis Olson as Uncle Henry, and Dave Arnold as the Wizard. The remaining cast members pull double and sometimes triple duty, playing Munchkins and Monkeys, Snowflakes and Poppies, Twinkies, Jitterbugs, Crows, and Trees. And let's not forget the glittering residents of the Emerald City.

Choreographing the musical numbers is no small task. Tamara Clemons took into account the varying degrees of ability and created dance numbers that are lively and fun. Everyone, down to the tiniest Munchkin tot, is utilized. And Dianne Dye and Beth Dietz did a fabulous job costuming the cast. The ingenuity needed to bring such things as Poppies and Snowflakes to life while lending a familiarity to characters everyone loves cannot be overstated.

It was a pleasant surprise, also, to see the imaginative way the many scene changes were handled. Large set pieces were minimal, and that made the transitions between scenes easy. Lighting, small set pieces, and the characters combined to create the scenes. Yet none of the drabness of Kansas or the brilliant colors of Oz were lost by keeping the sets simple and manageable. It was delightful to have a gentle shower of bubbles and balloons mark the arrival to Munchkinland.

One of the most fun moments in the show came with the arrival of the tornado that took Dorothy and Toto to Oz. Without giving too much away, the audience is treated to objects swirling around them while the winds howl. Technical directors Erin Middleton and Chris Konrady, their assistant Brandon Roth, and the special-effects duo of Naidine D'Angleo and Becky Myers are to be commended.

There were small glitches, as there will be with any show that carries the large cast and technical elements of *The Wizard of Oz*. And the pacing could have been a little brisker,

perhaps with a few cuts to the script.

But overall, Countryside Community Theatre's production is wonderful. It has to be a success when children are seen after the performance skipping alongside their parents while they sing, "We're off to see the Wizard." Join them. It is a journey easily recommended.